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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and the professions with approximately 100,000 members in 124 countries and territories around the world who are actively engaged working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women.

Soroptimist International recognises HIV/AIDS to be a global epidemic threatening human security and survival, and human rights and human development. As a non-governmental organisation, SI is committed to playing its part as a formal Partner with the World Health Organisation (WHO), in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, - UNAIDS.

Of great concern to our members is the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and children everywhere but particularly in the developing world.

Women are not only biologically vulnerable they are also made additionally vulnerable owing to their lack of economic and social power and their lack of control over their sexual and reproductive rights. Women who become infected with HIV tend to be diagnosed later than men, participate in fewer clinical trials, have less access to therapy, suffer greater stigma and isolation, and are more likely to die from AIDS and to pass on the virus to their children.

Statistics indicate that in Africa child mortality could triple within the next twenty years, that 13 million children will become orphaned, growing up alone because of HIV/AIDS. The impact of the disease on families is one of the greatest social catastrophes of modern times. Our members feel that the well being of women and children needs to be placed at the centre of prevention and support strategies.

Whilst recognising that there has been many initiatives aimed at reducing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS during the last twenty years, Soroptimist International urges governments and all other appropriate bodies to redouble their efforts to:

- Provide speedy, new and effective prevention programmes targeted at women and girls
- Ensure equal access and medical care to HIV infected women
- Give particular attention to the treatment of pregnant women and to the newly born children of HIV positive mothers
- Resource major efforts in research and treatment development and include women in the decision making process
- Provide adequate resources to support both HIV and AIDS victims
- Establish sex education programmes for teenage girls and boys in public schools; and investigate current programmes, where they exist, to correct deficiencies.
- Support UNAIDS programmes and projects with financial resources and actions.

For its part Soroptimist International will continue to: -

- Support work and clinical studies to enhance gender equality and equity
- Raise public awareness and disseminate information on HIV/AIDS

- Lobby governments and international agencies for increased resources and research
- Encourage and support the empowerment of HIV positive women in capacity building and inclusion in the strategic planning process; and also provide assistance with their outreach and networking
- Engage with men as partners in the fight against HIV and AIDS by encouraging them to take care of themselves, their partners and their families.

Our members will network with governments, non-governmental, voluntary and all other appropriate bodies, including the United Nations and the World Health Organisation to encourage complete inter-agency collaboration and co-operation, in recognition that only a global programme can be truly effective in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic.